

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, Congressman Joe Sestak released the following statement celebrating Israel's Independence Day.

On Tuesday, Israel celebrates its 59th year of independence. I share in this day of celebration by honoring the people of Israel who struggle daily to protect their independence and freedom.

Throughout Israel's short history, Israelis have fought against overwhelming odds to reestablish the birthplace of the Jewish People, and today, it remains the only democracy in the Middle East. Surrounded by hostile neighbors on each of its borders, Israel is steadfast on working toward its goals of peace and security.

I am proud to have visited Israel at least five times and to have seen firsthand the courage and steadfast resolve of its people. I was fortunate to oversee RELIANT MERMAID, the first military exercise between Israel and an Islamic country, as the senior U.S. military officer, having earlier helped plan it at the National Security Council while serving as Director for Defense Policy for President Clinton. I also traveled through Israel decades ago when every young couple seemed to have a pistol on the table; and later, when every couple seemed to have a cell phone at their table. My last visit was to tie one of my U.S. Navy air defense Aegis cruisers into the missile defense network of Israel, leaving the ship stationed off its coast for the nation's protection, as I brought the remainder of my Battle Group around into the Arabian Gulf for what was expected to be the start of the Iraqi war.

I look forward to a time when we will join Israel celebrating not only their independence but also a peaceful and secure Middle East. I congratulate the citizens of Israel and the entire Jewish community on the 59th anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from*

*Harvard University. □ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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